Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1621 (2008)[1]
Final version

General policy debate on the situation in China

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly presents its condolences to the Chinese nation for the victims of the earthquakes which hit the country so terribly. It welcomes the swiftness with which assistance was provided to the population, although it regrets that the Chinese military was instructed to protect the military installations instead of immediately assisting the affected population.

2. The Assembly wishes to pay tribute to the tremendous progress China has made in recent decades, especially with its economy, which is flourishing, its foreign policy, which is designed to create a stable international environment conducive to the pursuit of the country's development, and its key role as a mediator in numerous crises.

3. This progress, appreciable as it may seem, has, however, been followed neither by significant reforms of the political system nor by the necessary progress in the protection of human rights, as proved, among other things, by the increased repression conducted by the Chinese Communist Party on groups of dissidents. China cannot remain a leading economic power unless it succeeds in extending the benefits of its economic development to the population at large.

4. The Assembly reaffirms that the principles on which the fundamental rights of human beings rest are universal. It notes that, like the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, the People's Republic of China has ratified the United Nations Charter. While respecting the diversity of cultural approaches, it considers that the promotion of these principles should not stop at the borders of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe.

5. The Assembly therefore believes that it has a duty to look into the political situation in China and to voice its concern over the situation in respect of human rights and democracy. In doing so, the Assembly is not seeking to impose its point of view on China unilaterally, but believes it is fulfilling the vocation it has had ever since it was established.

6. In the light of the core values for which the Council of Europe stands, the Assembly is ready to open a dialogue with the Chinese authorities on a whole range of matters of common interest, in particular human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in order to encourage China to pursue reforms in these fields.

7. The Assembly is convinced that the diversity of cultural approaches with China can only be a source of mutual enrichment, particularly through political, intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

8. As the organiser of the 2008 Olympic Games, China has a unique opportunity to demonstrate to the world not only its organisational ability but also its determination to improve its record in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. There are many in China and elsewhere in the world who have high expectations of progress in this respect on the occasion of the Olympic Games. The Assembly regrets that these expectations have so far not been met.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 26 June 2008 (25th Sitting) (see Doc. 11654, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Mignon). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 June 2008 (25th Sitting).

9. The Assembly is, however, concerned that, two months from the opening of the Olympic Games, basic freedoms, such as freedom of expression and association, are still not guaranteed. Chinese citizens who voice their views, criticise the government, post articles on the Internet, give interviews to foreign journalists or practise their religion beyond the confines of government-controlled places of worship are still at risk.

10. Access to information is limited and the Internet and the press are subject to tight censorship. Moreover, the death penalty continues to be applied. Abusive forms of administrative detention are still widespread; arbitrary detention and imprisonment, torture and harassment of human rights activists, including union activists, lawyers and journalists, are common. Discrimination against rural migrants, ethnic minorities and women is also widespread.

11. The Assembly condemns the violent repression of demonstrations which have taken place over the past months in Tibet and neighbouring regions, which led to arrests, disappearances and deaths.

12. At the same time, the Assembly is encouraged by the renewed – albeit informal – talks which took place on 4 May 2008 in southern China between envoys of the Dalai Lama and representatives of the Chinese authorities. This was a laudable initiative.

13. The Assembly does not wish to condemn China outright, but rather questions the political functioning of the Chinese communist regime, which stands far from the principles of modern democracies.

14. In this context, the Assembly urges the Council of Europe member states and the international community to:

14.1. continue to discuss with China the major challenges of our constantly changing world and try to solve them together, in such fields as climate change, the fight against terrorism and against trafficking in human beings;

14.2. adopt a consistent and coherent approach with regard to China, aimed at bringing about tangible progress in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law;

14.3. exert individual influence on China to persuade it to engage in a substantive dialogue regarding Tibet and neighbouring regions.

15. The Assembly calls on the Government of the People's Republic of China to:

15.1. engage in a frank and sincere dialogue with the member states of the Council of Europe so that the major challenges of our constantly changing world can be solved together;

15.2. respect its ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as all the Council of Europe member states should do;

15.3. implement far-reaching reforms regarding respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, including after the end of the Olympic Games;

15.4. take concrete steps to fulfil its promise to improve its record in respect of fundamental freedoms, for example by lifting the Internet blockade, releasing the so-called "cyberdissidents", ending house arrests of human rights activists, stopping harassing and arresting members of religious communities, including Falun Gong practitioners, stopping the arbitrary detention, harassment and unfair dismissal of reporters and journalists, and guaranteeing freedom of movement and reporting for both domestic and foreign journalists during and after the Olympic Games;

15.5. end the crackdown on activists raising human rights concerns;

15.6. continue the dialogue with Tibetan representatives on the situation in Tibet;

15.7. consider setting up a truth and reconciliation commission to allow both Chinese and Tibetans to deal with the legacy of the conflict in this region and to reconstitute the history of abuses committed and injustices suffered on all sides.

16. The Assembly invites the Chinese Parliament to engage in a political dialogue in order to promote parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Once China will have accomplished appreciable progress in these fields, the Chinese Parliament will be able to apply for observer status with the Assembly.

17. The Assembly, and the Council of Europe in general, have gathered considerable experience in the field of democracy. The Assembly, while aware that it is up to each democracy to choose its own approach, is prepared to offer the benefit of this experience.

18. The Assembly encourages the European Union to continue to raise such issues as the death penalty, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, the situation of human rights activists, media freedom and freedom of expression in its political and human rights dialogue with China.

19. Finally, the Assembly is ready to send a delegation of parliamentarians for a fact-finding visit to China in order to gather in the field more information on the current situation in the country.